JUSTICE DENIED

The Untold Story of Nancy Argentino's Death in Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka's Motel Room

CONCUSSION INC.

author Irvin Muchnick

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a

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ebook short

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“… I immediately suspected foul play, and so notified the district attorney.”

WAYNE SNYDER

Deputy Coroner, Lehigh County (in a 1992 interview, as coroner)

Allentown and Sacred Heart Hospital Center

OUT-PATIENT SERVICES

P.O. Box 689 • 1200 South Cedar Crest Boulevard, Allentown, PA 18105

PATIENT NAME	PATIENT NUMBER	AGE	DATE OF SERVICE
ARGENTINO, NANCY LORRAINE	550257-0	23	05/11/83

GUARANTOR NAME AND ADDRESS

ESTATE OF N ARGENTINO
878 E 27TH STREET
BROOKLYN NY

INSURANCE COMPANY NAME
GROUP NUMBER | POLICY NUMBER

PLEASE RETURN THIS PORTION WITH YOUR PAYMENT.

AMOUNT OF PAYMENT $

DATE OF SERVICE	DESCRIPTION OF HOSPITAL SERVICES	TOTAL CHARGES	EST. INS. COV. NO. 1 PLAN ID	EST. INS. COV. NO. 2 PLAN ID	PATIENT AMOUNT
DETAIL	CHARGES/PAYMENTS				
05/11	LONG UNBELL PEN AR	19.00			19.00
05/11	MONITOR CHARGE	19.00			19.00
05/11	EMERGENCY ROOM	23.00			23.00
05/11	ANTIBODY SCREEN	15.00			15.00
05/11	CROSSMATCH/PREPAR	128.00			128.00
05/11	BLOOD TYPE	34.00			34.00
05/11	CBC	10.00			10.00
05/11	RPR REAGIN	8.50			8.50

PATIENT NUMBER

ALLENTOWN & SACRED HEART HOSPITAL CENTER

Nature of Injury or Symptoms: HUMPED BACK OF HEAD/PT EXPIRED

How did Accident occur: ALTERCATION

Date of Original Injury: 05/10/83 Time: 0400 AM

Treatment or Test Ordered by: DR. PASSI

WARD _____ E/R _____ DAYS _____ ROOM _____

ADM _____ O/C _____ ASC _____ REG _____

ACR _____ MED _____ DIAG _____ TOT _____

CLIN # _____ S/S _____ WAT _____ DIED _____

BY _____ DATE _____

AGH 1.000

ALLENTOWN & SACRED HEART HOSPITAL CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

IN A LONG AND UNORTHODOX CAREER as a freelance investigative journalist, my 1992 story on James Wiley Smith "Superfly Jimmy Snuka" Reiher and his companion Nancy Argentino – pro wrestling's Mary Jo Kopechne – resonates like no other.

In 1969, Senator Ted Kennedy, possibly inebriated as he left a party near midnight with Kopechne, drove his Oldsmobile Delmont 88 off a bridge on Chappaquidick Island, near Martha's Vineyard – then abandoned the 28-year-old woman, who died from crash trauma and drowning.

In 1983, then World Wrestling Federation superstar Snuka, possibly strung out on cocaine and other drugs as he left Room 427 of the George Washington Motor Lodge in Whitehall, Pennsylvania, for a television taping in Allentown, abandoned the 23-year-old Argentino in the culmination of what can reasonably be deduced as a case of, at minimum, unindicted involuntary manslaughter.

Kennedy emerged with a two-month suspended sentence for leaving the scene of an accident after causing injury – along with irrevocably damaged presidential ambitions. Reiher emerged legally unscathed. The subject of this ebook is the similarities and differences between the reputational fallouts for a privileged Massachusetts politician and a calculatedly savage Polynesian-born entertainer with a jungle-boy gimmick.

***

NINE YEARS AFTER THE SNUKA INCIDENT – then, as now, the source of underground fan gossip but little more – I was in the early stages of carving out a niche as a general-readership chronicler of the peculiar wrestling industry. My 1988 piece in *Penthouse* (r.i.p.) on the death-, drug-, and suicide-plagued Von Erich wrestling family was selected for an anthology of the year's best magazine articles. The same year, a story for *The Washington Monthly* on WWF (now WWE) chief Vince McMahon's

efforts to get out from under state regulations and taxes landed me on National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross.

In '92, WWF was coming off the federal steroid-trafficking conviction a year earlier of its Pennsylvania attending physician, Dr. George Zahorian, as well as newer reports that pedophile company executives and employees were preying on underage ring boys. New York's *Village Voice* gave me a $4,000 contract to write a cover story tying together the scandals. The Snuka piece was a "sidebar" to the larger story. I traveled to Allentown (indeed, stayed at the George Washington Motor Lodge), talked to cops and to reporters for the daily newspaper there, the *Morning Call*, and interviewed others and probed records.

I have a clear memory of knocking on the door of the Lehigh County Agricultural Hall, where WWF had recorded its regionally syndicated television shows prior to the historic cable TV wars and national expansion of the mid-eighties. I wanted to see the interior for a scene-setter, and I wanted to find out if anyone remembered anything about Snuka. The building manager closed the door in my face. "We know why you're here and we don't want any part of you," he said.

Thus, 18 years before the Jerry Sandusky-Joe Paterno scandal at Penn State University, which would unfold more than 150 miles west of Allentown, I had my first insight into what has become a cliché of national Election Night demographic analysis: "Pennsylvania consists of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh … and Alabama in between."

The *Village Voice* assignment didn't work out. The *Voice* editors' learning curve and agility proved inadequate, as other media outlets beat us to the punch on the various "Titangate" scandals (sans Snuka). I later collected on a court judgment in my favor, requiring the *Voice* to pay me the agreed-upon full fee. This Pyrrhic victory set the stage for my decades of work as a writers' rights activist – as National Writers Union shop steward at *SF Weekly*, then as assistant director of the NWU, then as a class-action copyright litigation consultant. In 2005, I led a slate of objectors to a global class-action settlement with the newspaper, magazine, and electronic database industries (a settlement partially orchestrated by my old friends at the NWU). The tortured path of that case through the federal courts included the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 decision, *Reed Elsevier v.*

Muchnick. At this writing, a satisfactory revised settlement was still being negotiated.

Meanwhile, around 1999, I posted the Snuka sidebar (but not the main and longer *Voice* article draft) at a website collecting both previously published and unpublished wrestling articles. The Snuka turned into an Internet samizdat classic, getting passed around the virtual water cooler the world over. Pirated versions and inanely uninformed interpretations added the precise overlay of mystery and sensationalism so relished by the wrestling cult (and the world at large). The prose of "Irvin Muchnick's Wrestling Journalism Archive" would become the foundation of my 2007 book from ECW Press, *WRESTLING BABYLON: Piledriving Tales of Drugs, Sex, Death, and Scandal*.

Snuka's own career had long been in decline, but that had nothing to do with whatever the public understood about Allentown '83 (that is to say, very little). Drug-addled, physically spent in his forties, fifties, and sixties, Snuka devolved from one of the most popular stars in the game into the prototypical Mickey Rourke figure from the Darren Aronofsky movie: an itinerant at ring bookings and autograph shows of small, independent promotions, who continued to do the occasional nostalgia cameo for WWE, which inducted him into its Hall of Fame. Snuka will turn 70 later this year. His daughter Tamina, one of his four children, is a WWE female performer, or "diva."

***

AND THAT'S HOW THINGS MIGHT HAVE STOOD FOREVER, had Snuka and his handlers not decided to lie through their teeth, carny-style, about Nancy Argentino and related topics in his newly published autobiography, *Superfly: The Jimmy Snuka Story*. The foreword is by Rowdy Roddy Piper. The introduction is by retired wrestler and *New York Times* bestselling author Mick Foley, who modeled parts of his own wildly risk-taking performance style after Snuka, a childhood hero; and who today – with a gruesome irony Foley himself doesn't seem to appreciate – promotes the work of the anti-sex assault organization RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network).

Depending on how you keep score, Snuka has told between three and five-and-a-half different versions of what went down in Allentown. Only with the extreme enabling of softball interviewers can he hide the fact that he still can't coherently retell even the version he is supposedly sticking with.

Twenty-one years ago, I had spoken briefly with Nancy Argentino's still-devastated surviving younger sister. Then, just weeks ago, I heard from Nancy's older sister, who told me that an *Allentown Morning Call* reporter was working on a "cold case" story about Snuka for the 30th anniversary of the incident on May 10, 2013.

Would I be interested in expanding, annotating, and updating my material? the older sister asked. The answer was obvious. Snuka and Foley took crazy plunges from the tops of cages; it's what they did. I write the stories the mainstream media don't want to publish about the unacceptable human toll of out-of-control bread-and-circuses American entertainment; it's what I do. That Snuka-Argentino dovetailed with current themes of my work, in exposing the disgrace of widespread coach sexual abuse and cover-up in our national Olympic swimming program, was a bonus.

(As we were going to press, at least one other newspaper, besides the *Allentown Morning Call*, was working on an anniversary story.)

Together with the sisters, I resolved that every dime of royalties from this project would go in Nancy's memory to an organization chosen by the family. They picked My Sisters' Place, a battered women's shelter and resource center in Westchester County, New York.

***

THIS EBOOK HAS FIVE ELEMENTS:

"THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE" reprints my 1,900 words from 1992 and provides the basic facts. No, ladies and gentlemen, Nancy Argentino did not jump out of a hotel window. Sorry, folks, but the episode three months earlier, when Snuka got arrested for a melee at a Howard Johnson's motel outside Syracuse (for which he eventually pleaded guilty), was not just a little misunderstanding. It was a violent precursor of avoidable death.

"JIMMY SNUKA'S PATHETIC LIES" reviews his book and recent public statements, and adds harsh comments on what I believe has been the timid and equivocal coverage of it in the "wrestling news media" (those three words, all too often, are oxymoronic).

"THE SHORT, INTERRUPTED LIFE OF NANCY ARGENTINO" attempts, with the help of her loved ones, to put a real name and face, and flesh and blood, on the tragedy of "that woman Snuka was involved with in Allentown."

"OTHER UPDATED INFORMATION"

"APPENDIX" has facsimiles of primary-source documents that show what Snuka and others said at the time of the incident, and allow readers to make final judgments for themselves.

In the end, not every crime has a clean solution. Speaking strictly for myself, I don't hold out for a miraculous thaw of the cold case and a turnaround by the public officials of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, who in 1983 conducted themselves so cravenly. District attorney William Platt, now an esteemed senior judge in the state court system, simply exercised his discretion, and exercised it poorly.

My goal is more modest, and I hope more effective: shining daylight on what happened – and in the process subjecting the D.A., WWE, and Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka to the full prosecutorial wrath of history and the court of public opinion.

Irvin Muchnick
May 2013

THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE

***This was written for the* Village Voice*, but not published, in 1992. (You will notice that the article already had been edited in* Voice *style, which included heavy use of conversational-sounding contractions.) The piece was posted online years later before being collected in the 2007 book* WRESTLING BABYLON.**

FOR VINCE McMAHON, THE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLAR MAN, wrestler Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka made for a challenging tag-team partner. The World Wrestling Federation's second-most-popular star in the early eighties, Snuka was an illiterate immigrant from Fiji, prone to bouts with the law that threatened his green card, and a drug abuser who often missed bookings. During a Middle East tour in the summer of 1985, fellow wrestlers say, customs officials in Kuwait caught him with controlled substances taped to his body, and he was allowed to leave the country only after some fancy footwork.

But Snuka's near-*Midnight Express* experience in the Persian Gulf was child's play compared to what happened on May 10, 1983. That night, after finishing his last match at the WWF TV taping at the Lehigh County Agricultural Hall in Allentown, Pennsylvania, he returned to Room 427 of the George Washington Motor Lodge in nearby Whitehall to find his girlfriend of nearly a year, Nancy Argentino, gasping for air. Two hours later, this 23-year-old wrestling fan – who'd worked as a dentist's assistant in Brooklyn and dropped out of Brooklyn Community College to travel with Snuka – was pronounced dead at Allentown Sacred Heart Medical Center of "undetermined craniocerebral injuries."

"Upon viewing the body and speaking to the pathologist, I immediately suspected foul play and so notified the district attorney," Lehigh County coroner Wayne Snyder told me on a recent trip to Allentown. In '83, Snyder was deputy to coroner Robert Weir.

Yet no charges were filed in the case, no coroner's inquest was held, and no evidence was presented to a grand jury. Officially the case is still open – meaning Argentino's death was never ruled either an accident or a homicide – though the original two-month-long investigation has been inactive for nine years. Under Pennsylvania's unusually broad exemptions from freedom of information laws, the Whitehall Township Police Department has so far refused my requests for access to the file.

Of particular interest would be two documents: the autopsy and the transcript of the interrogation of Snuka immediately thereafter. One local official involved in the investigation, as well as one of the Argentino family's lawyers, told me the autopsy showed marks on the victim other than the fractured skull. And former Whitehall police supervisor of detectives Al Fitzinger remembered that the forensic pathologist, Dr. Isadore Mihalakis, confronted Snuka to ask him why he'd waited so long before calling an ambulance.

Gerald Procanyn, the current supervisor of detectives, who worked on the case nine years ago, maintained that Snuka cooperated fully with investigators after being informed of his right to have a lawyer present, and was accompanied only by McMahon. Another investigator, however, saw things differently; he said Snuka invoked his naïve jungle-boy wrestler's gimmick as a way of playing dumb. "I've seen that trick before," the investigator said. "He was letting McMahon act as his mouthpiece."

Another curious circumstance was the presence at the interrogation of William Platt, the county district attorney. According to experts, chief prosecutors rarely interview suspects, especially in early stages of investigations, for the obvious reason that they may become witnesses and hence have to recuse themselves from handling the subsequent trials.

Detective Procanyn gave me the following summary of Snuka's story: On the afternoon before she died, Snuka and his girlfriend were driving his purple Lincoln Continental from Connecticut to Allentown for the WWF taping. They'd been drinking, and they stopped by the side of the road – the spot was never determined, but perhaps it was near the intersection of Routes 22 and 33 – to relieve their bladders. In the process, Argentino slipped on mossy ground near a guard rail and struck the back of her head. Thinking nothing of it, she proceeded to drive the car the rest of the way to the motel (Snuka didn't have a driver's license) and, after they checked in,

picked up take-out food at the nearby City View Diner. Snuka had no idea she was in any kind of distress until he returned late that night from the matches at the Agricultural Hall. Procanyn said Snuka's story never wavered, and no contradictory evidence was found.

Curiously, contemporary news coverage, such as the front page of the next day's *Allentown Morning Call*, made no mention of a scenario of peeing by the roadside; it focused, instead, on the question of whether Argentino fell or was pushed in the motel room. Nine years later the reporter, Tim Blangger, vividly recalled that at one point in his interview of Procanyn, the detective grabbed him by the shoulders in a speculative reenactment of how Snuka might have shoved the woman more strongly than he intended.

Procacyn also claimed to have no knowledge of any subsequent action by the Argentino family, except for a few communications between a lawyer and D.A. Platt over settling the funeral bill. In fact, the Argentinos commissioned two separate private investigations, and it's difficult to believe that Procanyn was unaware of them.

The first investigator, New York lawyer Richard Cushing, traveled to Allentown, conducted extensive interviews, and aggressively demanded access to medical records and other files. "It was a very peculiar situation," Cushing told me. "I came away feeling Snuka should have been indicted. The police and the D.A. felt otherwise. The D.A. seemed like a nice enough person who wanted to do nothing. There was fear, I think, on two counts: fear of the amount of money the World Wrestling Federation had, and physical fear of the size of these people."

Even so, Cushing declined to represent the family in a wrongful-death civil suit against Snuka. The lawyer cited the fact that Snuka and Argentino weren't married, that they didn't have children, and that she wasn't working, which would make it difficult to establish loss of consortium. "Moreover, Vince McMahon made it clear to me that her reputation would be besmirched. As a lawyer, I had to determine if a contingency [fee] was in order; my business decision, not my moral judgment, was no. The family wasn't pleased. They had a typical working-class family's anger that justice wasn't done."

Through the generosity of Nancy Argentino's father's boss, the family then retained a Park Avenue law firm. The report filed by its private investigator shows that Snuka was as creative outside the ring as he was inside it.

To the Whitehall police officer who responded to the first emergency call, Snuka said “he and Nancy were fooling around outside the motel room door when he inadvertently pushed Nancy and she fell striking her head.”

An emergency room nurse heard him state that “they were very tired and they got into an argument resulting in an accidental pushing incident. Ms. Argentino fell back and hit her head.”

In the official police interrogation, Snuka first floated the peed-on-the-roadside theory.

Finally, in a meeting with the hospital chaplain, he said he and Argentino had been stopped by the side of the road and had a lovers’ quarrel: “He accidentally shoved Ms. Argentino who then fell backwards hitting her head on the pavement. They then arrived at the motel and went to bed. The next morning Ms. Argentino complained that she was ill and stayed in bed…. When he came home from the taping, he observed that Ms. Argentino was clearly in bad shape.”

In 1985 the Argentinos obtained a $500,000 default judgment against Snuka in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia. The family never collected a dime; Snuka’s lawyers withdrew from the case, stating that they hadn’t been paid, and Snuka filed an affidavit claiming he was broke and unemployed and owed the Internal Revenue Service $75,000 in back taxes. Since ’83, the 49-year-old Snuka has been in and out of rehab centers and has wrestled off and on both in Japan and throughout this country. His original WWF stint extended two and a half years past Argentino’s death; his most recent ended earlier this year. According to the wrestling grapevine, he’s now trying to promote independent shows in, of all places, Salt Lake City, but my efforts to track him down there were unsuccessful.

Proving negligence, of course, is different than proving involuntary manslaughter or murder. But critics of the criminal investigation find fishy the failure of the police to examine seriously Snuka’s history of drug abuse and violence against women. Former wrestling great Buddy Rogers, who’d been hired by McMahon to serve as Snuka’s TV “manager” and to get him to important matches on time, said he stopped driving with the Superfly after he brazenly snorted coke when they were in the car together.

“Jimmy could be a sweet person, but on that stuff he was totally uncontrollable,” said Rogers, who was also Snuka’s neighbor on Coles Mill Road in Haddonfield, New Jersey. Snuka’s wife, with whom he had four

children, befriended Rogers' wife. "Jimmy used to beat the shit out of that woman," Rogers said. "She would show up at our house, bruised and battered. But she couldn't leave him – he had her hooked on the same junk he was using."

Nancy Argentino's younger sister remembered once being threatened by Snuka when they were alone at the family's home in Flatbush. "I could kick you and put my hands around your throat and nobody would know," he allegedly said. After Nancy's death, family members said, they received a series of phone calls from a woman who identified herself as a former Snuka girlfriend who'd tried to warn Nancy away from him. Snuka, said the woman, had once broken her ribs, and had a thing about pushing women back against walls.

Finally, there was the incident involving Snuka and Argentino at a Howard Johnson's in Salina, N.Y., outside Syracuse, just three months before Allentown. The motel owner, hearing noise from their room, called the police, who found Snuka and Argentino running naked down the hallway. It took eight deputy sheriffs and a police dog to subdue Snuka. Argentino sustained a bruise of her right thumb. Snuka pleaded guilty to violent felony assault with intent to cause injury, received a conditional discharge on counts of third-degree assault, harassment, and obstruction of a government official, and donated $1,500 to a deputy sheriffs' survivors' fund. Whitehall police later decided this was all the result of "a nervous desk clerk," Detective Procanyn told me.

* * *

ACCORDING TO ATTORNEY CUSHING, McMAHON MADE A REMARK at one point in their discussions that was at once insightful and chilling. "Look, I'm in the garbage business," the promoter said. "If you think I'm going to be hurt by the revelation that one of my wrestlers is really a violent individual, you're mistaken."

Six months after Nancy Argentino died, the *Village Voice* ran a prescient article entitled "Mat Madness" by the late columnist Arthur Bell, weather vane of the lower-Manhattan gay-arts demimonde. After attending a Madison Square Garden show headlined by a bout between Superfly Snuka and the Magnificent Muraco, Bell, who knew next to nothing about

wrestling, commented on the spectacle's graphic references to bodily functions and on its barely sublimated undercurrents of sexual dominance and sadomasochism. "Take my word," Bell declared, "by the end of 1984 wrestling will be the most popular sport in New York since mugging."

He concluded with a vignette at the Garden stage exit, where a swarm of fans, led by a woman named Bea from West Orange, converged to taunt the wrestlers as they emerged in their street clothes.

"Hey, Superfly," Bea shouted to Snuka. "You goddam fuckin' murderer. When are you gonna kill another girl?"

JIMMY SNUKA'S

PATHETIC LIES

IN HIS NEW BOOK, JIMMY SNUKA ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN both the Syracuse and Allentown episodes in ways no objective observer could begin to find convincing.

In the January 1983 incident at the Howard Johnson's in Elmira, Snuka said he was drinking but not doing cocaine, "and the women were all over the place."

Nancy Argentino was "my girlfriend," who "understood" that he had a wife to whom he was not faithful on the road. (More on this aspect in the ebook's next chapter.) They were just having "a good Superfly time when all of a sudden, the police burst into our room. I don't know why they chose my room – maybe mine was the first one they passed …"

"I was in my underwear, and they were all confrontational. They beat me up with their batons…."

"Nancy was screaming at the cops when they came into our room. I was so angry. I didn't need to be handcuffed with German shepherds barking at me. I was drinking some beer, and maybe smoking some pot. But that was it. I remember they yelled at me to put my clothes on so they could take me to jail. I refused. I don't mind being in my underwear — I wrestle in tights, brudda! To this day, I'll mow the lawn in a Speedo. They hauled me out in my underwear and took me to prison. I tried to explain to them that we were just having fun and apologized for waking people up."

Multiple contemporaneous newspaper accounts tell it differently. According to those reports, Nancy said Snuka got angry with her when "she ignored him while he spoke about 'the truth of God.'" Covered only by a sheet, she screamed that she wanted to leave the room. Snuka would not let Nancy out or the police in. The brawl ensued when a total of eight or nine deputies forced the door open and, with the help of K-9 dogs, eventually subdued Snuka.

That night Nancy's older sister got a series of messages from the hotel desk clerk, stating that Nancy was wrapped in a sheet in the hallway and needed to speak to her. By the time the sister caught up with the messages, Nancy said everything had calmed down and she was OK.

To her mother, Nancy would admit that Snuka initially went berserk because he couldn't find his drugs and blamed the hotel housekeeping staff.

***

WITH RESPECT TO ALLENTOWN, SNUKA has fallen back on veritable free-association fiction. The basic settled version is that Nancy took a tumble while she was urinating by the roadside before they reached Whitehall. Yet even this version became part of a composite – as when he said they had a "lovers' quarrel" and a pushing incident when peeing at the side of the road. At other times, Snuka had the two of them in a lovers' quarrel or horsing around later in the motel room.

In his embarrassing radio interviews promoting his book, Snuka requires prompting to remember whether he is supposed to say he called an ambulance as soon as they reached the motor lodge on Monday evening the 9th, or not until the next day. (Examples of others hand-holding Snuka through a story for which he is the only possible living authority are viewable on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmI2IGQ4unQ and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6BS1J1IIRU.) In fact, Snuka called the front desk for an ambulance just before midnight on Tuesday, May 10. Nancy was pronounced dead at the hospital shortly after 2:00 a.m. Wednesday. District attorney William Platt would justify not charging Snuka by determining that Nancy's head injury came not from a blow, but from impact when she fell. In public statements at the time, Platt acknowledged that there was an altercation.

Snuka wrote in his book: *"[W]e were drinking some beers, and she asked me to stop so that she could pee. I pulled over to the side of the road and I waited in the car for her, drinking. When she came back, she told me she slipped on the way and hit her head. I didn't see it happen, but I remember she told me she was jumping over a little river or stream that was there and she slipped. She seemed okay, and when I asked her if she was feeling all*

right, she said yes. I didn't see any blood anywhere, so neither of us was concerned and we kept driving to Allentown.

"I think we stopped drinking after that — she did, at least. I asked her over the next few hours if she was feeling better, and she just kept telling me she had a headache. When we finally got to Allentown and checked into our hotel, I told her to lie down and rest. I left her alone for a little bit to hang out with Mr. Fuji and the boys, and she was sleeping when I came back. She seemed fine so I went to bed. The next morning, I got up and headed out for the TV shoot. She was still breathing, and I was not concerned that this was a life-or-death situation. At worst, I thought she might have a concussion, and I figured I'd take her to the doctor if she needed to go when I got back. When I got back to the hotel, I remember being very surprised that she was still in bed. I woke her up, but she could hardly breathe. I called the front desk, and asked them to call an ambulance. I followed the ambulance to the hospital. Two hours later, they told me she had passed away. I think she died of a fracture to her skull. I was devastated."

Detective Procanyn had told me that Nancy, not Snuka, was driving the car because Snuka didn't have a license. It's just one more detail told with more care by someone covering up for the suspect than by the suspect himself. Another is the supposed takeout food order from City View Diner.

All these contradictions do not even include the unlikelihood of a professional athlete's not knowing that leaving someone alone to sleep was exactly the wrong way to treat a concussion.

As for the legal maneuverings: *"… I was questioned by police and let go. At one point, I went with Vince McMahon Jr. to either a court or law office, I don't remember which because I was still in shock. All I remember is he had a briefcase with him. I don't know what happened. I think Vince Jr. picked me up from the hotel and took me there. He didn't say anything to me. I don't know if he gave Nancy's family money or anything. The only thing I know for sure is that I didn't hurt Nancy. I couldn't believe what had happened. Some people have written that I was just playing stupid, but I really didn't know what was happening around me."*

***

THE WRESTLING FAN MEDIA SHARE RESPONSIBILITY for the relative invisibility of the Allentown story over the years. Proof that they aren't unique in such lapses comes from the story of retired Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis, who is making a smooth transition from Super Bowl star to ESPN commentator 14 years after he obstructed justice in a murder investigation stemming from a fight in which he was involved – after which he paid a six-figure settlement to the family of the murder victim.

The unique argument of wrestling journalists for their own selective diligence is that the general public and media do not take wrestling seriously. The wrestling media seem to alternate between approving and disapproving of this phenomenon, depending on convenience. In the context of domestic violence and death, this is a cop-out.

The dean of wrestling writers, Dave Meltzer of the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, provided this appalling quote to the ghostwriters of Snuka's book: *"[The Allentown incident] affected [Snuka's legacy]. People romanticize him a lot. I don't think it tainted his career, though. I think there was an awareness about it. It was covered in the paper, but it wasn't like big headlines — not like how it is today with TMZ. It's not like fans would go out to the arenas and boo him. People wanted to like him. He was a natural babyface. He just stood out everywhere. I remember the [arrest] with the dogs more. There was follow-up in the papers on that one."*

When I confronted Meltzer for an explanation of how he could possibly say he remembers the farcical sequence in Elmira better than the controversial death of Nancy Argentino, he doubled down in denial in an email: *"Say what you want. Because of it being in a larger market and more covered in New York, there was far more publicity over the incident in Syracuse at the time. In the long run, no of course the Argentino story was bigger. But at the time both happened, among wrestling fans in Madison Square Garden and in the territory everyone knew one story and only insiders knew the other."*

After the publication of *Superfly*, here's how Meltzer reviewed Snuka's account of Allentown in the January 14 *Observer*: *"The book does bring up the death of Nancy Argentino, his girlfriend during his 1983 heyday, who died while they were together in a case that was heavily talked about in stories in the early 90s that insinuated it was a murder cover-up.*

“Snuka claimed they were driving from Connecticut to Allentown and she asked him to stop the car so she could pee on the side of the road. When she got back in the car, she told him she slipped on the way and hit her head. She said she was okay. He said he saw no blood and wasn’t concerned. But later she said she had a headache. She went to sleep it off and he went to the tapings. When he got back to the hotel, she was in bed and could barely breathe. He said he called the front desk, asked to call an ambulance and two hours later, he said she passed away in the hospital, he believed from a fractured skull.

“He said he was questioned by police and let go. Her family later filed a wrongful death lawsuit against him and won a judgment, which may have been a default judgment. Even though Snuka was earning big money at the time, he was broke, and they never collected.”

After I complained to Meltzer that his review was sorely lacking – I called it “a joke” – he added this in the next week’s issue: "*In the story on Jimmy Snuka and his version on the death of Nancy Argentino, Irv Muchnick, who researched the story in one of his books, noted that the story that she went to the bathroom on the side of the road, slipped, and fell on her head, was one of three completely different stories Snuka gave to police and the hospital chaplain at the time. The Argentino family sued him on a wrongful death claim, and won a judgment, but he claimed he had no money and never paid it. Nearing 70, Snuka has said that he’s going back in the ring now that he’s recovered from ankle replacement surgery.*"

(Regarding the last, Meltzer could have added that Snuka’s surgery was underwritten by donations to a dubious charity for old-timers called Wrestler’s Rescue.) In April, after I alerted Meltzer to upcoming media surrounding the 30th anniversary of the Argentino death, he wrote: *“I want to bring this up, based on the story when reviewing the Jimmy Snuka book months ago on the death of Nancy Argentino. People who have studied the story have never accepted Snuka’s version as being true, and noted so many contradicting statements at the time of the death. The Argentino family won, via default judgment (meaning Snuka never hired a lawyer nor fought the case) wrongful death lawsuit against Snuka and a $500,000 verdict in 1985 in U.S. District Court in Philadelphia. The family never received any money as Snuka claimed to have been broke when the verdict came in over the death of their daughter, coming up on 30 years ago, on May 10, 1983, at the*

George Washington Motor Lodge in Whitehall, PA. No charges were ever filed, no coroner's inquest was held, and no evidence was ever presented to the Grand Jury even though Wayne Snyder, deputy to the Coroner at the time, said in an article written years later by Irv Muchnick that upon viewing the body and speaking to a pathologist, he suspected foul play. Snuka's story in the book, and the one he told police at the time, was Argentino had to go to the bathroom while they were on the road, and they stopped the car, she went out, slipped and hit the back of her head. He told police she appeared fine immediately afterwards, and they continued to the motor lodge in Whitehall. After returning from matches in Allentown that night, he found her near death. The local newspaper, the Allentown Morning Call, when talking to police on the case, reported the death as whether Argentino's fractured skull was caused by being either pushed or falling in the motel room. Another police officer claimed at the time Snuka told him the two were fooling around when he accidentally pushed her and she fell, landing on her head. An emergency room nurse, according to the investigation by the law firm that represented the Argentino family in the lawsuit, claimed Snuka said they were tired, got into an argument, and he accidentally pushed her and she landed on her head. Their investigation also claimed that the hospital chaplain was told by Snuka that when they stopped on the side of the road, they had a fight, and he accidentally shoved her, and she fell backwards, hitting her head on the pavement, and they went to the motel to sleep and the next morning she wasn't feeling well and stayed in bed while he left to wrestle, before returning and finding her in bad shape. While not the champion, Snuka was the hottest star at the time in the WWWF, and Vincent Kennedy McMahon, who had purchased the company from his father and his father's partners the year earlier, did most of the talking to police at the time."

Meltzer's more complete comments in the *Observer* do soften his reprehensible one in the Snuka book. However, they do not excuse his rhetorical hairsplitting, which boils down to, "Of course *I* understand that allegedly beating a woman to death is important. It's just that *they* don't."

THE SHORT, INTERRUPTED LIFE

OF NANCY ARGENTINO

NANCY ARGENTINO WAS AN ATTRACTIVE, VIVACIOUS working-class girl from Brooklyn. She had the poor judgment to get involved with the wrong guy, which is common enough. She paid for her mistake with her life – still far too common, though I suggest worth more than a shrug of resignation.

The one regret I have over my 1992 article was the title's provocative tabloid word "groupie." On the plus side, the sex-and-drugs-and-rock-and-roll obsession of the wrestling grapevine contributed to whatever has kept the story alive at all. But rushes to typecast victims of domestic violence also contribute to re-victimizing them, along with impeding public understanding of both the circumstances of a particular case and the larger societal problem.

Nancy's family insists – and I concur upon further examination of the record – that her relationship with Snuka was monogamous from her end. To be sure, she was enjoying an interlude of adventure, travel, and party life, but she did not center her universe around banging wrestlers. And contrary to Snuka's assertions, she might not even have known that he was married. At the time of their death, she and he were looking at townhouses in New Jersey, where they planned to live together.

Nancy became a wrestling fan through her childhood friend Ellen, wife of WWF undercard wrestler Johnny Rodriguez (known as "the unpredictable Johnny Rodz"). Ellen took Nancy into Manhattan a few times for the matches at the Garden and introduced her to wrestlers.

Prior to Snuka, Nancy had dated only one of them: Florida bodybuilder Terry Bollea, who had just been brought into WWF as a bad guy under the handle "Hulk Hogan."

At the time, 1979-80, it was already apparent that Hulk enjoyed a special look and charisma that had him headed straight to the top. His breakthrough would come with Verne Gagne's Minneapolis-based American Wrestling Association, before the McMahon family hired Hogan away in late 1983 and launched "Hulkamania" in the WWF. Bollea/Hogan, of course, became

one of the biggest gate attractions, and by some measures still the single most successful crossover star, in the industry's history.
The Argentino family remembers Terry as a classy and dignified suitor when Nancy introduced him to them. The couple dated around three times. Nancy broke up with Hogan, though, when she learned he had other girlfriends. In one of his own books, Hogan makes reference to Nancy, his fondness for her, her unfortunate demise, and Snuka's "dark side."

***

"NANCY WAS TRULY MY MOTHER'S FAVORITE CHILD," her older sister says.
Pretty, smart, skillful at making friends, she attended Catholic school through eighth grade. In junior high, she got mugged once walking home. After that, she developed "Brooklyn street smarts."
The older sister says: "Nancy had a great sense of humor and an infectious laugh. I never met a person who did not like her. She was charming and everyone wanted to hang around with her. Even some of my friends who were older and some of our younger sisters' friends befriended her."
Dad was a typical Italian-American man of his time and place. He drank and gambled. He liked nice cars, good clothes, and a big meal at a fancy restaurant.
Mom worked part-time and later full-time as soon as the girls were old enough. Ralph and Caroline argued, often loudly but never violently. Following a screaming match, he would simply sleep off his drunkenness, and he would be apologetic the next day. So fundamentally decent and well-liked was Mr. Argentino that he wound up working as the personal chauffeur for a wealthy Manhattan businessman and mover and shaker.
A therapeutic history of Nancy might note two things about why she was drawn to Jimmy Snuka and why she was overconfident in her safety with him. Like her father, Snuka offered a ticket to the fast lane and fantasy. Like her mother, Nancy took on the task of keeping her man under control. Unlike the men of her previous experiences, however, the Superfly under the influence was not someone who could be controlled.

In her teens, Nancy took a job in a dental office in a tough neighborhood. She was prompt and reliable, and had a good touch with people; she nurtured patients who were afraid of dentists and she consoled those in pain. But Nancy also was said to take no crap. She called out, even threatened to call the cops, on those who tried the scam of passing around others' Medicaid cards in order to get free care.

The dentist and his wife encouraged Nancy to go to nursing school. She took three semesters of classes at Brooklyn Community College. Then she decided to take a break and go on the road for a while with Snuka. Johnny Rodz had introduced them a half-year or so after she broke up with Hulk Hogan.

***

SOME TIME BETWEEN THE MELEE IN ELMIRA and the fatal trip to Allentown, there was a bizarre series of confrontations involving Snuka on a stop at the family home in Flatbush. Nancy and Jimmy had gone there to pick up some of her clothes. Nancy's parents were away. The only one in the house was the younger sister.

While Nancy was retrieving things from her upstairs bedroom, Snuka conversed with the younger sister in the dining room. To her shock, he pulled a stash of cocaine from his pocket, laid it out on the table, and proceeded to snort a line and invite the sister to join him.

When Nancy came back downstairs, she exploded at Snuka. How dare he do drugs in her parents' home and expose her kid sister to that behavior? A screaming match ensued.

Things calmed down and they ordered Chinese takeout food. But while the three of them were eating, another argument broke out over something vague. It was then that Snuka gestured and said to the sister, coldly and ominously, "I could kick you and put my hands around your throat and nobody would know."

***

BY THIS TIME THE FAMILY NOTICED that Nancy was carrying a Bible around. Catholics don't tend to keep Bibles on their persons. Nancy seemed to be turning to evangelical Protestantism. After a lifetime of sibling rivalry with her younger sister, Nancy told her she was sorry for whatever bad things she had ever done to her. In that ultimate of big-sister kindnesses, Nancy invited the sister to go through her closet and pick out any cool clothes or accessories or jewelry the sister wanted.

After the upstate New York episode, Mrs. Argentino was becoming very concerned. Everyone hoped Nancy would come to her senses and get away from Snuka.

On May 9, 2010, Nancy called her mother to tell her she would be returning to Brooklyn the next day to stay for a while. Mrs. Argentino was thrilled: the next Sunday was Mother's Day.

But Nancy didn't arrive on the tenth. Her mother went to bed worried. It wasn't like Nancy not to call and explain she had been delayed.

Around 3 a.m. Mrs. Argentino was awakened by a call from the hospital in Allentown. Nancy was dead.

OTHER UPDATED INFORMATION

CHARACTER DISPOSAL

Wayne Snyder resigned as Lehigh County coroner in 1996 and retired altogether in 2004. After *WRESTLING BABYLON* was published in 2007, I called Snyder, offered to send him a copy of the book, and invited his further comment. He said to send him the book, and I did, but I never heard back from him. When I tried calling Snyder again for this ebook, the number I had for him was no longer in service.

Gerald Procanyn, chief of detectives for the Whitehall police, later became an investigator in the Lehigh County district attorney's office. I was unable to determine Procanyn's whereabouts as this ebook was being published.

Wrestling great Buddy Rogers died at age 71 in 1992, just after the article intended for the *Village Voice* was completed.

William Platt, the county district attorney, now 72 or 73 years old, spent 14 years as a county judge, ultimately the presiding judge. In 2010 the state Supreme Court named him a senior judge in Superior Court.

VINCE McMAHON'S ROLE

Wrestler Don "The Magnificent" Muraco recalled the Allentown incident in Snuka's new autobiography. In 1983 Muraco and Snuka were locked in the hottest "feud" on the WWF circuit, for which they shot "angles," or storylines, at the Allentown TV tapings. As Muraco notes in the following passage, May 10 was chaotic in more ways than one: that was also the night another wrestler, Eddie Gilbert, suffered a broken neck in an auto accident in Allentown. (Gilbert would die of a heart attack in 1995, at age 33; like many wrestlers, he abused painkilling drugs.)

"I was at the hospital [with Gilbert] all night," Muraco said. *"The next morning, the homicide detectives got to the hotel. They were knocking on Jimmy's door, and I guess he was confused or was not understanding who they were, so I spoke to them, and they informed me Nancy had passed*

away the night before. I spoke to Jimmy, and called Vince Jr. to tell him what was going on with Eddie Gilbert and Jimmy. He jumped in a car, drove to Allentown, and that was it. I had no part in any meetings or anything. It was just three weeks after the promo where we went at it, when I spit at Snuka and he tore off my clothes and hit me with a microphone."

In those days, Vince McMahon was the television announcer as well as the executive producer. I presume he drove from Allentown to his home in Connecticut at the conclusion of the TV taping, then turned around and drove back to Pennsylvania after Muraco called. WWE did not respond to my email seeking clarification.

On June 16, 2008, during the research for my second book, *CHRIS & NANCY: The True Story of the Benoit Murder-Suicide and Pro Wrestling's Cocktail of Death*, WWE lawyer Jerry McDevitt had a long email exchange with me on a variety of matters. In the course of the exchange, McDevitt wrote, "[Y]our insinuation that Mr. McMahon in some unspecified way kept authorities from charging Jimmy Snuka for murder in 1983 is an odious lie."

THE $25,000 OFFER

According to the Argentino family, Nancy's mother got a call from someone at TitanSports/World Wrestling Federation shortly after the funeral. She does not remember the name or company title of of the person. The family says the conversation was very brief, with the caller offering the Argentinos $25,000 not to talk further about the incident. The mother snapped, "You think my daughter's life is worth $25,000 to me?" She hung up.

WWE did not respond to my email requesting confirmation or comment.

THE UNPREDICTABLE JOHNNY RODZ

In 1992 I called Ellen Rodriguez, Nancy's childhood friend. A couple of minutes into the conversation, someone grabbed the phone from her. "Who

are you?” the voice demanded. It was “the Unpredictable Johnny Rodz,” now operator of a wrestling school and training center. Rodz told me to go away.

While preparing this ebook, I emailed Rodz directly. I did not receive a response.

OTHER MARKS ON NANCY’S BODY

According to the Argentino sisters, the funeral home manager told them that preparing Nancy for viewing was a very difficult job. They said that, even with the undertaker’s heavy makeup, discoloration could be seen on Nancy’s throat area.

SNUKA AT THE FUNERAL HOME

Italian-American wakes are often three-day-long affairs. On the third afternoon, Snuka finally showed up at the Andrew Torregrossa & Sons Funeral Home in Brooklyn. The family remembers that Snuka was accompanied by Buddy Rogers. Snuka did little talking. He deferred most of the talking to Rogers, who offered the family condolences.

Nancy’s older sister says: “There’s nothing wrong with dressing casually, but Snuka was so dressed down that he looked sloppy and disrespectful. He was wearing sandals. He looked insane. And he was doing that routine where he pretended that he didn’t speak much English.”

Snuka’s behavior turned weird. The family says he went to view Nancy and started “talking to” and touching her as if she were alive. He leaned into the casket and kissed her passionately, in the process messing up her hair and makeup.

Then he went up to Nancy’s mother and said, “She looks terrible.”

Snuka’s whole visit lasted 20 or 25 minutes.

SNUKA AT THE PUB IN FLATBUSH

Once Nancy's father took Snuka with him to his favorite hangout in Flatbush, a pub called Eddie's Cabin. In a flash of anger during an exchange with another customer – no one remembers much of the details – Snuka picked up a chair and hurled it at the mirror behind the bar. Mr. Argentino made Snuka apologize and pay for the damage.

CALLS FROM OTHER WOMEN

After Nancy's death, the family received a series of phone calls over a period of years from a number of women who said they had been with Snuka prior to Nancy. The family believes the most persistent of these callers might have been Snuka's wife at the time, Sharon Reiher. If so, her motives were likely complex: combining confessions of Snuka's history of violent behavior toward her with attempts to pump the Argentinos in return for information on a possible lawsuit.

Unquestionably, the woman identified herself as Snuka's wife the first time she called Nancy's mother. Mrs. Argentino simply said, "Tell Snuka he's going to rot in hell," and hung up.

There were additional calls, perhaps from another woman who said she had had a relationship with Snuka when he wrestled in the Carolina territory, prior to his big WWF run. She said he beat her up all the time and broke her ribs. She was the source who claimed that Snuka liked to push women backward against walls. The family says this woman had an accent and described herself as a Pacific Islander. It is not clear whether this was the same woman as the purported wife, or a second woman.

Nancy's older sister says, "My mother was at a vulnerable point and grieving for Nancy, so she talked to this woman for years. The woman was kind and sympathetic, and consoled my mother. She even sent her a picture of herself."

APPENDIX

PRIMARY-SOURCE DOCUMENT FACSIMILES

This is to certify that this is a true copy of the record which is on file in the Pennsylvania Division of Vital Records in accordance with Act 66, P.L. 304, approved by the General Assembly, June 29, 1953.

(Fee for this certificate, $3.00)

Charles Hardester
Charles Hardester
State Registrar

WARNING: It is illegal to duplicate this copy by photostat or photograph.

SEP 06 1984
Date

07845
No.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
VITAL RECORDS
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
(Coroner)

STATE FILE NO.

1. NANCY ARGENTINO — Sex: F — 2. Date of death (Mo., Day, Yr.): May 11, 1983

4. Race: White — 5A. Age last birthday: 23 — 6A. Date of birth: 3/30/60 — 6B. State or foreign country of birth: NY — 6C. County of birth: Kings — 6D. City, Boro, or Twp. of birth: Brooklyn

7A. County of death: Lehigh — 7B. City, Boro, or Twp. of death: Salisbury Twp. — 7C. Hospital or institution: Lehigh Valley Hospital Center — 7D. If hosp. or inst., indicate DOA, OPD, or dept. unknown (specify)

8. Decedent's Mailing Address: 878 E. 27th Street, Brooklyn, NY, 11210 — 9. Marital Status: Single — 10. Surviving Spouse (if wife, give maiden name): N/A

11. Usual Occupation: Dental Assistant — 12. Kind of business or industry: Dental

13. Citizen of what country: USA — 14. Was deceased ever in U.S. Armed Forces? No — 15. Social Security Number:

16A. State: New York — 16B. County: Kings — 16C. Did decedent live in a township? — 16D. Yes, decedent lived in — 16E. No, decedent lived within actual limits of: Brooklyn — city or town.

17. Father's name: Ralph Argentino — Mother's maiden name: Caroline Martino

18A. Informant's name: Ralph Argentino — 18B. Informant's Mailing address: 878 E. 27th Street, Brooklyn NY 11210

19A. Burial — 19B. Cremation — 19C. Date of burial, etc.: 5/14/1983 — 19D. Name of cemetery or crematory: Greenwood Cemetery — 19E. Location: Brooklyn, New York

20A. Signature of funeral director and license number: Valerie J. Strouble — FD-010852-L — 20B. Name and address of funeral establishment: Weber Funeral Homes, Inc., 502 Ridge Ave., Allentown, PA 18102

21A. Registrar's Signature: Wendy Wolf — 7-26-84 — 21B. Date received by registrar: 7-26-84

22. On the basis of examination and/or investigation, in my opinion, death occurred at the time, date and place and due to the cause(s) stated.

23A. Signature and title: Wayne E. Snyder Deputy Coroner — 23B. Date Signed (Mo., Day, Yr.): Aug. 22, 1984 — 23C. Hour of death: 1:50 A.M. / P.M.

24. Name and Address of Certifier (Physician, Medical Examiner or Coroner) (Print or Type): Deputy Coroner Wayne E. Snyder 1602 Turner St. Allentown, Pa. 18104

25. Name of Attending Physician

26. IMMEDIATE CAUSE:
PART I (a) Craniocerebral Injuries
(b)
(c)
PART II Other Significant Conditions — Conditions contributing to death but not related to cause given in Part I (a)

27. Autopsy: Yes — 28. Was case referred to Medical Examiner or Coroner? Yes

29A. If Acc., Suicide, Hom., Undet., or Pending Investigation (Specify): Undetermined — 29B. Date of Injury (Mo., Day, Yr.): May 10, 1983 — 29C. Hour of Injury: Unknown A.M. / P.M. — 29D. Describe how injury occurred: Unknown

29E. Injury at work? No — 29F. Place of Injury (At home, farm, street, etc.): Unknown — 29G. Location (Street or RFD No.): Unknown — (City, Boro, or Twp.): Unknown — (State): Unknown

MEMO TO: SRW

FROM: DNI

DATE: May 15, 1984

SUBJECT: Death of Nancy Argentino

On May 9, 1984, I traveled to Allentown and met with Lehigh County District Attorney William Platt. Mr. Platt made his investigation file available to me for review, but did not permit me to make any photocopies.

Mr. Platt's files reveal that a telephone call was received by the Whitehall Township police department at 12:15 a.m. on May 11, 1983. In response, police arrived at Room 427 of the George Washington Motor Lodge and observed Ms. Argentino on the bed gasping for air. An ambulance arrived from the Whitehall emergency squad at approximately the same time as the police. Ms. Argentino was transported to the Allentown Sacred Heart Medical Center and was pronounced dead at 1:50 a.m. on the same date.

Responding Whitehall police officer was D. Rhodes, badge 22; responding Whitehall emergency squad attendant was John Rackus.

At the ASH emergency room officer Rhodes spoke with Jimmy S. Snuka, w/m, showing a home address of 185 Washington Avenue, Hamden, Connecticut with no telephone. Mr. Snuka was the boyfriend and traveling companion of Ms. Argentino. He advised the police that "he and Nancy were fooling around outside the motel room door when he inadvertently pushed Nancy and she fell striking her head."

Emergency room nurses Carol S. McBride, R. D. 4, Box 117, Coopersberg, Pennsylvania; home telephone 967-2040 and Susan St. Clair, 443 North 8th Avenue, Apt. 2, Allentown, Pennsylvania; home telephone 437-1299 heard Mr. Snuka state "He and Ms. Argentino arrived in town late last night... They were very tired and they got into an argument resulting in an accidental pushing incident. Ms. Argentino fell back and hit her head."

Attending physician at ASH was Dr. Joseph Fassl, 2820 Oakland Road, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania who later recalled a similar conversation with Mr. Snuka. Dr. Fassl also advised the police that Mr. Snuka seemed "genuinely concerned about the condition of Ms. Argentino and otherwise showed normal emotions and responses concerning a loved-one."

Mr. Snuka a/k/a "Superfly" was born May 18, 1943, in the Fiji Island. He is a resident alien in this country holding a valid alien registration ("green") card. His real name appears to be James Wiley Smith Reiher. Alien Registration Card No. A14127834.

There was an official police interrogation of Mr. Snuka the day Ms. Argentino died. At first, his story was that they had been driving west-bound on Route 22 towards Allentown on the night of May 9, 1983. They stopped at the side of the road for Ms. Argentino to relieve herself behind a bush. She slipped and struck her head on the pavement.

At a later time, Mr. Snuka met with the ASH Hospital Chaplain, Barbara Smith (home telephone 821-8066). He told Ms. Smith that they were stopped by the side of the road last night and had a lovers quarrel. He accidently shoved Ms. Argentino who then fell backwards hitting her head on the pavement. They then arrived at the motel and went to bed. The next morning Ms. Argentino complained that she was ill and stayed in bed. Mr. Snuka went to the local television station which was taping his professional wrestling match. When he came home from the taping, he observed that Ms. Argentino was clearly in bad shape. She was having difficulty breathing and was discharging puss from her nose and mouth. Mr. Snuka later reiterated this version to the police.

Mr. Platt also obtained statements from fellow wrestlers (Don Muraco and "Fugi"). These individuals were characterized as "credible" by the interrogating police officer. Their statements were that Mr. Snuka was quite concerned during the taping session of May 10 that his girlfriend was ill. They both knew Ms. Argentino since she had been traveling on the professional wrestlers circuit. Mr. Snuka was characterized as "protective" and "loving" of Ms. Argentino. Following the taping session, the wrestlers generally go out for a few beers. On this occasion, Mr. Snuka had one beer and excused himself saying he wanted to attend to his sick girlfriend.

Ms. Argentino's mother, Caroline Argentino of Brooklyn, New York was also interviewed. Ms. Argentino stated that she was quite fond of Mr. Snuka and felt that her daughter got herself into a good relationship. Ms. Argentino noted that Mr. Snuka attended the funeral and was extremely upset at that time. She also noted that Mr. Snuka paid for the funeral. Services were at the Andrew Torregroffo Funeral Home, 2265 Flatbush Avenue, New York, New York. Ms. Argentino also noted that Mr. Snuka frequently bought gifts for Nancy and herself and helped out with the family expenses by giving her cash.

The Whitehall police investigation uncovered two other facts concerning Mr. Snuka's background. First of all, he was married. His wife, Sharon Snuka resides at 3310 Colloney Drive, Charlotte, North Carolina 28211. She was quite cooperative with the police.

Apparently, there was an amicable separation between Mr. and Mrs. Snuka. Mrs. Snuka indicated that she did not think her husband was violent or having any sort of problems.

The other interesting fact is that Mr. Snuka had a prior arrest for "simple assault" on Ms. Argentino as well as resisting arrest. On January 18, 1983, Snuka and Argentino were "fooling around" in a motel room in Syracuse (Onondaga County) New York. There was a substantial amount of noise from their room and the motel owner called the police. When the police arrived, they observed Mr. Snuka and Ms. Argentino, naked, running down the motel hallway. According to newspaper accounts in the Syracuse Herald Journal, it took eight deputy sheriffs and a police dog to arrest Mr. Snuka.

Ms. Argentino sustained only a bruise of her right thumb and that portion of the case was dropped. With regard to the resisting arrest charge, Mr. Snuka agreed to perform an exhibition wrestling match for the deputy sherrifs' survivors fund and to donate $1,500 of his own money to that fund. This occurred, Mr. Snuka got his picture on the front page of the Syracuse Herald Journal and that was the end of the case. Syracuse Herald reporter Dan McGuire, P. O. Box 4915, Syracuse, New York 13221, wrote about the January incident, the subsequent exhibitions and donations and followed up with articles concerning the Allentown incident.

The autopsy in this case was performed by Lehigh County Medical Examiner Jerry Mihalikis, telephone 691-1564. The autopsy report has never been transcribed. However, I was orally advised that Dr. Mihalikis concluded that death was consistent with a single fall whereby the victim struck her head on a hard substance, such as pavement. Dr. Mihalikis did not find any bruises, lacerations or other indications of a beating or prior injuries. Dr. Mihalikis did not find any evidence of recent sexual contact. Finally, Dr. Mihalikis did not find any unusual amounts of dirt, gravel or other substances on Ms. Argentino's clothing. With this information, the cause of death would have been termed accidental if a formal autopsy report was prepared.

As a part of the investigation, the Whitehall police also reviewed Mr. Snuka's assets. They were only able to uncover a single bank account. This was with Chase Manhatten in New York, a savings account numbered 251407904. The balance on May 17, 1983 was $700. A review of the bank records revealed no unusual withdrawals or deposits. The only motor vehicle found to be titled in Mr. Snuka's name was a 1977 Lincoln with Connecticut license of 788BBM. Mr. Snuka did not own any real estate in Connecticut.

It is possible that the house in which his wife and children reside in North Carolina was owned, but the police did not check on this. No other assets were uncovered.

After I finished reviewing the file, Mr. Platt and I had an "off the record" discussion concerning this case. First of all, he advised that he could not and would not officially participate in the civil lawsuit. However, he advised that the Whitehall police department had been instructed to honor a record subpoena, should one be issued. Since there was a face to face meeting between Mr. Platt and Mr. Snuka before the decision was made to refrain from criminal charges, Mr. Platt gave me his impression.

Mr. Platt found Mr. Snuka to be credible and somewhat sympathetic. Mr. Snuka is able to communicate well, although he does not have much formal education. He comes across as a "nice guy." Mr. Platt has no doubt that some sort of shove occurred resulting in the blow to the head resulting in death. Mr. Platt does not feel he could ever prove criminal intent. Obviously, it would be significantly easier to prove negligence.

On the other hand, Mr. Platt does not believe Mr. Snuka is the type of person who could hide assets. Mr. Platt (having spent many years in private practice doing civil work) indicated a concern that we would never be able to collect a judgment from Mr. Snuka. Further, Mr. Platt noted that the victim's mother and Snuka's fellow wrestlers would unanimously testify as to what a good relationship the two people had.

Mr. Platt indicated that he would be more than happy to speak with me again should the need arise.

Please let me know if there is anything further I should do concerning this matter.

DNZ/lmf

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

RALPH ARGENTINO, Individually, and CAROLINE ARGENTINO, Individually, and RALPH ARGENTINO, as Administrator of the Estate of NANCY ARGENTINO	:	CIVIL ACTION
v.	:	
JAMES WILEY SMITH REINER a/k/a/ JAMES SNUKA a/k/a/ JIMMY SNUKA a/k/a SUPERFLY	:	NO. 85-1091

ORDER

AND NOW, this day of , 1985, upon consideration of the petition of Alan Klein, Esquire, and Horace D. Nalle, Jr., Esquire, for leave to withdraw their appearances on behalf of James Wiley Smith Reiner, it is hereby ORDERED and DECREED that the petition for leave to withdraw appearance as counsel for defendant is granted.

Cahn, J.

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

RALPH ARGENTINO, Individually, and CAROLINE ARGENTINO, Individually, and RALPH ARGENTINO, as Administrator of the Estate of NANCY ARGENTINO	:	CIVIL ACTION
v.	:	
JAMES WILEY SMITH REIHER a/k/a/ JAMES SNUKA a/k/a/ JIMMY SNUKA a/k/a SUPERFLY	:	NO. 85-1091

PETITION OF ALAN KLEIN, ESQUIRE AND
HORACE D. NALLE, JR., ESQUIRE, FOR LEAVE
TO WITHDRAW AS COUNSEL FOR DEFENDANT

Alan Klein and Horace D. Nalle, Jr. ("Petitioners"), counsel for defendant, respectfully represent that:

1. Petitioners were retained by Mr. Reiher to represent him in the above cause of action.

2. Petitioners have, in fact, represented Mr. Reiher, and in the course of the representation, have performed the following services of record:

a. Answered the Complaint;

b. subpoenaed the Assistant District Attorney of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, to produce documents relevant to this case;

c. subpoenaed the records of the Director of Medical Records of the Lehigh Valley Hospital Center;

d. subpoenaed the records of Isidore Mihalakis, a forensic pathologist at the Lehigh Valley

Hospital Center;

e. retained local counsel in Syracuse, New York, and, through local counsel, subpoenaed the records of the District Attorney of Onondaga County, New York; and the records of the Onondaga County Sheriff;

f. drafted and served upon plaintiffs Interrogatories of Defendant to Plaintiff -- First Set, containing some 62 interrogatories; and

f. participated in a telephone conference with the Court on June 19, 1985.

3. Petitioners have spared no time or effort in representing Mr. Reiher, and, in addition to the services of record described above, Petitioners have met twice with Mr. Reiher and his wife, have met once with counsel for plaintiffs, and conferred with said counsel repeatedly by phone.

4. For a period of several months, discussions have taken place between Petitioners and Mr. Reiher and his wife concerning their ability to pay Petitioners' fees and costs, both for work which has been done and work which, in Petitioner's professional judgment, must be done in this case in order to properly and adequately prepare Mr. Reiher's defense.

5. In a series of telephone conversations, the last having occurred in the first week of October 1985, Mr. Reiher and his wife informed Petitioners that the defendant and his family were in dire financial straits. Their plight was exacerbated by Mr. Reiher's unemployment, Mrs. Reiher's unemployment, the Reihers'

obligation to pay back federal income taxes, the maintenance of their four children, and various other financial obligations. Petitioners attach herewith Mr. Reiher's affidavit in support of the instant Petition.

6. The case is currently scheduled for trial on December 3, 1985. The jury is scheduled to be picked on December 2. The discovery cut-off date is November 29, 1985.

7. Counsel for plaintiff has noticed Mr. Reiher's deposition for October 15, 1985. The Reihers have informed Petitioners that they cannot pay their firm's fees in connection with defending such a deposition, and that Mr. Reiher cannot even afford the airplane fare to Philadelphia from Hawaii, where he now lives with his family.

8. Petitioners have rendered to Mr. Reiher, without charge, an opinion concerning the possible consequences of their withdrawal.

9. As of August 31, 1985 Petitioners had rendered unremunerated services to Mr. Reiher with a value of $4,328.75. Additional legal services have been rendered by Petitioners since August 31. Petitioners have also incurred out-of-pocket disbursements, including the payment for the legal services of local counsel in Syracuse, New York, in the amount of $853.56, for which they have not been compensated by Mr. Reiher.

10. Petitioners have in the past attempted to settle this case on terms that, in their opinion, were financially realistic for Mr. Reiher. Such attempts have not been successful, however.

11. Petitioners have no reason to believe they will ever

receive payment for the amount of unpaid fees and costs, exceeding $5,000, already incurred in this case. Petitioners have no reason to believe that further fees incurred would or could ever be paid in light of Mr. Reiher's precarious financial situation.

WHEREFORE, Petitioners respectfully request leave to withdraw their appearance on behalf of Mr. Reiher.

Dated: October 17, 1985

Alan Klein
Horace D. Nalle, Jr.
DRINKER BIDDLE & REATH
1100 PSB Building
Broad and Chestnut Streets
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Attorney for Defendant
James Wiley Smith Reiher

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

RALPH ARGENTINO, Individually, and CAROLINE ARGENTINO, Individually, and RALPH ARGENTINO, as Administrator of the Estate of NANCY ARGENTINO	:	CIVIL ACTION
v.	:	
JAMES WILEY SMITH REIHER a/k/a/ JAMES SNUKA a/k/a/ JIMMY SNUKA a/k/a SUPERFLY	:	NO. 85-1091

VERIFICATION

Alan Klein, being duly deposed and sworn according to law, states the following:

1. With Horace D. Nalle, Jr., he is counsel for the defendant in the foregoing matter:

2. He and Mr. Nalle are Petitioners herein;

3. The facts set forth in the foregoing Petition for Leave to Withdraw Appearance are true and correct to the best of his personal knowledge;

4. The instant Petition is not interposed for the purpose of delay.

Alan Klein

Sworn to and Subscribed
before me on this 17th day
of October, 1985.

Notary Public

MARIANNE G. HAVERLAND
Notary Public, Phila., Phila. Co.
My Commission Expires Dec. 10, 1989

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA

RALPH ARGENTINO, Individually, and CAROLINE ARGENTINO, Individually, and RALPH ARGENTINO, as Administrator of the Estate of NANCY ARGENTINO	:	CIVIL ACTION
v.	:	
JAMES WILEY SMITH REIHER a/k/a/ JAMES SNUKA a/k/a/ JIMMY SNUKA a/k/a SUPERFLY	:	NO. 85-1091

AFFIDAVIT

James Wiley Smith Reiher, being duly sworn according to law, does hereby state the following:

1. I am the defendant in the above action.

2. I used to be a professional wrestler.

3. I am currently unemployed. I have not worked since July, 1985.

4. My family and I are now extremely poor. To begin with, my wife and I owe approximately $75,000 in back taxes to the Internal Revenue Service.

5. My current personal assets consist mostly of clothing and jewelry. There is also a bank account jointly in the name of my wife and myself with a balance of a couple of hundred dollars.

6. I own no real estate.

7. My wife does have title to some real estate. The market value of her equity in this real estate probably does not exceed our federal income tax liability.

8. I have no money to pay lawyers to defend me in this lawsuit.

9. When my prior livelihood was terminated, I moved with my family to Hawaii where we have relatives.

10. I have no money to come to Pennsylvania to be deposed.

11. I saw Nancy Argentino fall by the side of the road, and later in the motel room, and I think she hit her head. I did not push her or strike her.

12. I am very sorry that she died because she was a wonderful young lady. I regret this very deeply and personally, and I am sorry for the Argentinos' loss.

13. I cannot offer the Argentinos any money for their terrible loss because it was not my fault and because I have no money, and because I have four children of my own whom I love and want to take care of.

14. I know the Argentinos feel grief for their loss and I know they want to be comforted. They were my friends, and I hope they will find a way to show mercy on me and not take advantage of my present situation and my inability to defend their lawsuit.

I,

James Wiley Smith Reiher

Sworn to and Subscribed
before me on this 2 day
of October, 1985.

Notary Public
Commission Exp. 4/12/86

ABOUT AUTHOR IRVIN MUCHNICK

IRVIN MUCHNICK is the author of *WRESTLING BABYLON: Piledriving Tales of Drugs, Sex, Death, and Scandal* (2007) and *CHRIS & NANCY: The True Story of the Benoit Murder-Suicide and Pro Wrestling's Cocktail of Death* (2009). His next book, *THE CONCUSSION INC. FILES*, will be published in 2014.

Muchnick is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, *The Washington Monthly*, *People*, and many other major magazines and newspapers. He has been interviewed on forums as diverse as National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross, ESPN's *Up Close* with Roy Firestone, CNN's *Nancy Grace*, and Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*. A former assistant director of the National Writers Union, Muchnick was also the named respondent of the landmark 2010 Supreme Court decision *Reed Elsevier v. Muchnick* – part of what *Publishers Weekly* called "the central rights dispute of the digital age."

Muchnick has become a foremost writer on the concussion crisis in American football, through his website and blog Concussion Inc. (http://concussioninc.net**) and the Concussion Inc. series of ebooks: *DUERSON* (November 2011), *UPMC: Concussion Scandal Ground Zero* (January 2012), and *OUT OF MY HEAD: My Life In and Out of Football by George Visger* (February 2012).**

With Anthony Roberts, Muchnick also co-authored the ebook *THE CHINA SYNDROME: How Athletes and Celebrities Get Their Performance-Enhancing Drugs – How a Rogue Prosecutor Bungled Their Bust* (February 2012).

In association with Tim Joyce, Muchnick most recently has led the reporting of the national scandal of coach sexual abuse and its cover-up in the youth programs of the U.S. Olympic Committee's national governing body, USA Swimming. In 2012, Muchnick authored the ebook *PENN STATE IN THE POOL: The Cover-Up of the USA Swimming Youth Coach Sex Abuse Scandal*.